(a) whether it is a fact that the peace process received a setback because of acheiving no significant success despite negotiating ceasefire with ULFA in Assam and its connections with I.S.I. of Pakistan;

(b) if so, the details of dialogue proceedings carried out by the Central Government during the last two months in this regard; and

(c) what is being contemplated about the action to be taken in the ensuing months?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI S. REGUPATHY): (a) to (c) Three rounds of talks with People's Consultative Group (Peoples' Consultative Group) set up by United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) had been held. Efforts with People's Consultative Group representatives for holding these talks were continued even after three rounds through mutual initiatives. Government had also declared unilateral Suspension of Operations (SoO) by Army against ULFA from 13.8.2006 to 20.9.2006 with a view to create a conducive atmosphere for holding of peace talks. Since there was no direct response from ULFA and reports were received of regrouping, new raising, movement of stores/ arms, violence and extortion by ULFA cadres, Counter Insurgency Operations against ULFA have been resumed.

The Government is open to talks with any militant group provided they shun violence. However, Government is taking appropriate action to protect the lives and property of its citizens.

Prevention of ULFA attacks

2315. SHRI MOINUL HASSAN: Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether in view of its latest strike wherein ULFA terrorism claimed 14 lives in Guwahati Government consider the problem is likely to go away by itself or through talks, indirect or direct; and

(b) what steps have been taken to upgrade intelligence and tighten the security, increasing the security forces and comprehensive sweep on the ground, to prevent further attacks?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI S. REGUPATHY): (a) The Government is open to talks with any

militant group including United Liberation Front of Asom (ULFA) provided they shun violence.

(b) The Government has strengthened intelligence and security set up in the State including redeployment and induction of additional Central Para Military Forces. The counter insurgency operations have been intensified and the security forces have been successful in neutralizing a number of cadres of ULFA and other militant groups.

Ban on employment of foreigners

2316. SHRI V. HANUMANTHA RAO: Will the Minister of HOME AFFAIRS be pleased to state:

(a) whether Government have decided to avoid country-specific ban on employment of foreigners;

(b) whether it is also a fact that smaller Indian firms face difficulties in getting permission to employ foreign crew for ships and vessels and technical personnel;

(c) what steps Government would take to ensure security, and at the same time create transparency and efficiency; and

(d) the steps proposed to avoid delays and confusion in such matters?

THE MINISTER OF STATE IN THE MINISTRY OF HOME AFFAIRS (SHRI SHRIPRAKASH JAISWAL): (a) Employment of foreigners including crew members in India is governed by existing visa regime.

(b) Irrespective of the size of the Indian business firms, the existing visa regime permits highly skilled/professionals to come to India to work. No visa/permission is granted for routine jobs or jobs for which large number of Indians are available.

(c) and (d) Missions are authorized to grant visa on merit at their end subject to eligibility criteria as laid down for grant of visa and no objection from security stand point.